

New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park

Evolution of the Jazz Complex

On November 11 and 12, 2000, The American Institute of Architects hosted a design charette to assist New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park with the development of its permanent facilities. A year earlier on August 2, 1999, officials from the city of New Orleans and the National Park Service signed a 99-year lease giving the National Park Service control of four buildings in Louis Armstrong Park on the northern edge of the French Quarter.

The Historic Structures and Conditions report published in May 2000 stated that the four buildings in this new Jazz Complex required renovation and stabilization work to convert them into a visitor center, administrative offices, exhibit space, resource center, and performance areas. Modifications to the landscape to increase visibility of the park and visitor enjoyment were

also identified as priority concerns. During the charett planning meeting, three teams of Tulane University architectural students, city and regional officials, professional architects, New Orleans Jazz Commissioners, and park staff visited the proposed jazz complex, discussed solutions to the park's needs, and created three preliminary site concept plans.

The design charette, held at the Tulane University's School of Architecture, was a cooperative response to the identification of the park's needs. It was also the latest step in the development of New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park.

Park Development

In 1987, the 100th Congress resolved that "Jazz is hereby designated as a rare and valuable national American treasure to which we should devote our attention, support, and resources to make sure it is preserved, understood and promulgated."

After four years of public meetings with groups studying the feasibility of creating a National Park Service unit commemorating jazz, Congress created the park on October 31, 1994, to "preserve the origins, early history, development and progression of jazz."

Jazz is America's most widely recognized indigenous musical art form. Just as America evolved with each new wave of people from other lands arriving on her shores, jazz was influenced by many musical traditions and elements from around the world—African, European "classical," Caribbean, Spanish, Indian, and some Asian forms. It, in turn, influenced rock and roll, blues, and country music while evolving into a modern contemporary music form.

New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park is a new partner on the jazz scene. Until July 2000, the park functioned as an itinerant storyteller. With no visitor contact facilities, the park staff told jazz stories on trains, in local neighbor-

Perseverance Hall. Photo by Margie Ortiz, NPS.



Rabassa House.
Photo by Margie
Ortiz, NPS.

hoods, and at annual festivals. Staff had to immediately establish partnerships with neighborhood social organizations and jazz clubs, musicians, public schools, colleges, civic foundations, and city, state, and federal agencies and commissions. These partnerships enabled the historical park to begin carrying out its mission of establishing a permanent home for the park, identifying historic resources, coordinating educational programs, and promoting a broad range of activities.

On July 8, 2000, the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park opened temporary visitor facilities within the French Quarter at 916 N. Peters Street. Here visitors can get the latest information regarding the best places to experience the people, places, events, and stories that are New Orleans jazz. Exhibits, lectures, demonstrations, children's programs, live performances, and a sales outlet provide visitors with unique and dynamic ways to connect with the sights and sounds of jazz.

Another important step in the park's development was the presentation of the design charette results to National Park Service Southeast Regional Office staff involved in implementation of the general management plan for the historical park.

Louis Armstrong Park

The creation of Armstrong Park displaced approximately 400 families from their historic Tremé neighborhood. This neighborhood has a rich musical tradition that was dramatically altered during the development of Armstrong Park. Demolition of structures began in the 1960s with the current landscape being developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Several important jazz sites were lost during this time. No historic cultural landscape remains within the park.

An iron fence surrounds the park restricting access for the neighborhood. The main entrance to the park is a white metal lighted archway at St. Ann Street that runs through the French Quarter and past Jackson Square. A secondary entrance located at Dumaine Street extends through the French Quarter and ends at Café du Monde on Decatur Street. A statue of Louis Armstrong is located midway between the two entrances.

A prominent feature of the park is a 3-4 foot deep lagoon constructed with bridges that connect areas of the park. Congo Square and three buildings—Municipal Auditorium, Sewage



and Water Board Building, and Mahalia Jackson Center for the Performing Arts—are the other primary features in Armstrong Park outside of the designated Jazz Complex. A parking area is located in the northwest quadrant of the park.

Jazz Complex

The Jazz Complex includes two original structures: Perseverance Hall No. 4, an old Masonic Lodge listed on the National Register, and the Caretakers House, currently the home of radio station WWOZ. The Reimann and Rabassa Houses, moved to the site during the construction of the park, are the other two structures originally included in the 1999 lease.

A space needs assessment determined that these four structures were insufficient to meet the needs of the historical park. National Park Service staff worked with the City of New Orleans to draft an amendment to the lease. A later agreement with the mayor of New Orleans will allow the NPS to include a 1948 fire station and the remaining section of the southeast quadrant of Armstrong Park in the lease.

Perseverance Hall will remain a performance and education space. Historically, the Masonic Lodge permitted musical performances in the Hall. The Reimann House will be converted to park administrative headquarters. A breezeway with an elevator tower connects the two structures and provides access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

A resource center will be created in the Rabassa House. It will house the park library, oral history collection, and electronic resources for use by school groups and visitors. The Caretakers House, the only currently occupied structure, will become law enforcement offices. The fire station will become the visitor center and will be the first point of contact for visitors. New Orleans

Jazz NHP boundaries exclude the lagoon that is maintained by the city.

In addition to rehabilitation of the structures, several visibility issues were addressed by the design teams. The Jazz Complex is not highly visible from outside Armstrong Park. Visual connections between the park and its access routes as well as visual connections within the park need improvement.

Recent negotiations with the city produced an opportunity to relocate radio station WWOZ from its cramped broadcast facility in the Caretakers House. WWOZ, a non-profit station operating under the auspices of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, provides the potential for an exciting partnership with the park. Visitors to the historical park will be able to observe and participate in live radio broadcasts. The partnership would enable the station to consolidate its broadcast facilities and offices into one building. The Preferred Alternative Plan provides for the new building to be built near the fire station in a location that will not impede visibility from the firehouse to the rest of the Complex. WWOZ would raise the money to build the structure and would have a separate lease with the city.

Standards for the maintenance of the lagoons to protect public health and safety will be

written into the operations agreement with the city. Access hours and open hours of both Armstrong Park and the Jazz Complex will be included in the agreements. Appropriate surveys will be done to identify any underground tanks and potential hazardous materials within the buildings (asbestos and lead paint).

No date has been set for completion of the facilities, but cooperative efforts from many divisions within the NPS Southeast Regional Office, the city of New Orleans, and park staff are moving that date closer. The design charrette provided the park with valuable information on which to base future development. It also created an important partnership between Tulane University and New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park.

Carol S. Ash is a museum technician at Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site, Atlanta, Georgia.

Margie Ortiz is Chief of Interpretation, New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park, New Orleans, Louisiana.

For further information about the historical park and its development contact:
Superintendent, New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park, 365 Canal Street, Suite 2400,
New Orleans, LA 70130, 877-JAZZ-NPS or 1-877-520-0677, <www.nps.gov/neor>.

Carol S. Ash

Rehabilitating MLK's Neighborhood

On October 10, 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed legislation creating Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site to commemorate and memorialize Dr. King. President Carter stated,

It's my hope that by preserving the physical environment in which Dr. King developed his concept of social justice, our people will come to understand more fully what we have accomplished and what remains to be done. May it be a perpetual reminder of Dr. King's great work and inspire people everywhere to strive for the realization of his dream of equal rights and equal opportunity for all.

For 20 years, Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site has partnered with private and governmental agencies to protect and interpret the places where Martin Luther King, Jr. was born, where he lived, worked, and worshiped, and where he is buried. The historic site functions within a living, breathing community that reflects Dr. King's continuing influence today. The historic site preserves the past as it moves toward the future.

The past and the future converged on October 18, 2000, at the Founder's Day Ceremony celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the historic site. The National Park Service recognized the contributions of four individuals to the